

Nathaniel Chambless House
New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail
Hancocks Bridge Vicinity
Salem County
New Jersey

HABS No. NJ-1202

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

NATHANIEL CHAMBLESS HOUSE

HABS No. NJ-1202

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Location: Vicinity of Hancocks Bridge, Lower Alloways Township, Salem County, New Jersey

Significance: This patterned brick house features a gable-end zigzag motif, one of several typical designs employed by the early eighteenth-century Quaker builders who dominated the area of West New Jersey at this time.

Description: Built 1730, with additions. The original block is three bays wide, one-unit deep, and two stories tall with a raised basement and one interior double-stack gable-end chimney; a two-bay, two-story addition extends the width of the house. The original block is brick, laid in Flemish bond, with beltcourse just below the second-story window sills. The dominant designed element of the dwelling is the overall zig-zag brickwork created using glazed headers in the exposed original end gable. The brick addition is laid in common bond and it lacks gable end pattern work; there is a second chimney at approximately the center of the combined building, and a gable-end chimney on the added block; both of which date to the later construction. The plain box cornice has simple gable-end returns. On the 1730 facade, infill brickwork and repointing suggest that the original fenestration pattern has been lost to the installation of smaller windows, and there is evidence that a one-story porch once covered the length of the original block. Today the glazing patterns include twelve-over-one-, four-over-four-, six-over-six, and one-over-one-light double-hung sash. The newer end of the block features a modern one-story frame addition that intersects with a gable-end shed-roof porch.

History: Specific to Salem County and western Cumberland County are the patterned brick houses built by Quaker settlers in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Of approximately thirty-seven patterned brick houses in Salem County, fifteen are within the New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail area. The few patterned brick houses in Cumberland County are around Greenwich and Roadstown; the tradition filtered into these areas with the Quaker followers of John Fenwick. The settlers of Cape May and Cumberland counties relied on wood rather than brick as a building material because of the abundant trees, especially the cedar found in the southernmost swamps.

The area defined approximately by the Lower Alloways Creek watershed, was dominated between 1720-34 by the "Weighty Friends," a collection of Quakers who worshipped with the Salem, Alloways Creek, Cohansey (Greenwich), and Salem meetings. They also engaged in cohesive brick-building schemes on the gable ends of their homes--among them Nathaniel Chambliss.¹

Georgian in plan, the houses are distinguished and named according to the pattern depicted in the coursing of the brick walls--of which "the more intricate patterns can be matched nowhere else in America."² The designs created in the laying up of vitrified, or glazed, headers applies to four basic patterns. The first and most common pattern, known familiarly as Flemish bond, features glazed headers substituted for plain ones. The second is an all-over design called a diaper--depicting diamonds or vertical zigzags--that is rarely combined with dates and initials. The third pattern is a single decorative unit, such as a diamond placed at the top of a gable. The last pattern renders a combination of dates,

¹ Michael Chiarappa, "The Social Context of Eighteenth-Century West New Jersey Brick Artisanry," *Things Olde Magazine* (January/February 1993), 26.

² Thomas J. Wertenbaker, *The Founding of the American Civilization: The Middle Colonies* (NY: Cooper Square Publishers, 1963), 238-39.

initials, and bond designs in the wall.³

The Flemish checker bond has been cited as the first type of patterned brick work imported to America. The Bradway-Hall House (ca. 1691) is believed to be one of the earliest examples of checker-bond work in South Jersey today, and it may have led the way for others. Here, "the checker has been found to appear on the facade alone, on the facade and rear together, on one gable-end alone, and on all four walls of the house."⁴

Other commonalities among these dwellings are the raised entrances accessible by steps, prominent beltcourses and watertables on the front facade, interior gable-end chimneys, and pent roofs over the doors and windows. Many were dramatically altered and enlarged by changing a gambrel roof to a gable, as in the Padgett House (1735). The formality and elegance depicted in the style and materials reflect a statistically elite level of Quaker owner who, like eighteenth-century aristocratic families in other Tidewater regions, expressed their wealth and power through their domiciles.

"The characteristic Salem [County] house is a small, earlier brick house and a large, later brick house, both on the same axis, or a small brick house which could have had a larger brick addition that never got built." With few exceptions, most of the patterned brick houses in Salem are hall-and-parlor or one-cell hall plans. Burlington County houses also had a severely restricted pattern field and made extensive use of the pent roof; until the late seventeenth century, pent roofs on Salem County houses were limited to the front or rear facades.⁵

The bricklayers-builders of these houses, though anonymous, are considered artisans. Most settled around Salem between 1720-64. Once established here, their decorative techniques influenced local craftsmen--especially those in Burlington County, opposite Philadelphia. Historian Paul Love believes that patterned brick houses did not appear there until the 1740s, almost fifty years after the first one was constructed in Salem County.⁶

One may surmise that a family of bricklayers trained in this kind of work, perhaps from one of the eastern shires of England, came to Salem where their zigzags, diamonds, dates and initials worked into gable ends with vitrified brick, won them a reputation for skill and added distinction to the building.⁷

Prior to patterned brick work reaching the American colonies, it was widely used in France. In England during the sixteenth century, patterned brick work was used for major buildings, then in the seventeenth century for less-significant structures. In the 1720s, dating the house using glazed headers was coupled with the Flemish-bond pattern. This is evidenced in the Darkin House (1720) and the Abel Nicholson House (1722), both in Elsinboro Township below Salem. These two dwellings, as well as the John Maddox Denn House (1725) outside Hancocks Bridge, and the Padgett House, near Harmersville,

³ Paul Love, "Patterned Brickwork in Southern New Jersey," *Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society* 73 (July 1955): 183, 193.

⁴ Love, 186.

⁵ Love, 195.

⁶ Love, 193-95.

⁷ Wertenbaker, 239.

feature dates, initials, and a diamond diaper pattern.

The use of the vertical zigzag pattern is prominent in the William Hancock House (1734), near Hancocks Bridge in Lower Alloways Creek. The Hancock House, like the Chambless house, in Lower Alloways Township, also combines the date, initials, and vertical zigzag pattern. Most of these, as with patterned brick houses outside the study area, boast Flemish-bond coursing on the front or rear walls, or both.

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